



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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**INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENT FOR WHOOPING CRANE RENEWED;
REVISED MEMORANDUM OUTLINES RECOVERY ACTIONS FOR U.S. AND CANADA**

Two countries sharing one of the world's most endangered species renewed their commitment for its recovery today as the United States and Canada signed a memorandum of understanding on the conservation of the whooping crane.

Signing the document were John Turner, Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and H. Anthony (Tony) Clarke, Director General of the Canadian Wildlife Service. The signing took place at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Denver, Colorado.

"The remarkable progress this species has made over the last 50 years is due to an intensive management program which has been anchored in a spirit of teamwork between the United States and Canada," Turner said. "I consider this program a model for international cooperation in recovery of endangered species."

The whooping crane, North America's tallest bird, is known for its beautiful courtship dances and graceful flight. Only 16 birds remained in the wild in the 1940's. Today, there are over 200 birds in captive and wild flocks.

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The two countries have been working together on whooping crane recovery for over half a century. Efforts intensified in 1967 when Canadian and U.S. scientists began establishment of a captive flock at the Fish and Wildlife Service's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland with eggs taken from the Canadian breeding grounds of the only remaining wild flock. This flock migrates over 2,500 miles between Wood Buffalo National Park in Northwest Canada and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Gulf Coast of Texas.

The first formal memorandum of understanding on whooping crane recovery was signed by the United States and Canada in 1985. Today's signing revises and extends that document, and outlines cooperative whooping crane recovery actions for the next 5 years.

The revised document reflects the current recovery goal of 2 or 3 captive flocks, each containing 5 to 15 breeding pairs, rather than the one Patuxent flock. To this end, a second captive flock was established in November at the International Crane Foundation headquarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin. This flock was established with 22 whooping cranes from Patuxent. A Canadian site for a third captive flock is currently under consideration.

The document also calls for close consultation between the Canadian and U.S. Whooping Crane Recovery Teams. This has occurred, for example, in the U.S. and Canadian Recovery Teams' 1989 recommendation to suspend transfer of whooping crane eggs to the Grays Lake, Idaho, experimental flock. This flock was established 15 years ago in hopes of creating a wild flock with a shorter migration. The flock, which relied on sandhill cranes as foster parents, has failed to reproduce. Fieldwork will continue through 1991 to determine whether the cross-fostering technique has caused improper sexual imprinting in female whooping cranes.